

Advising and Supporting Teachers

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Introduction

This book is a handbook for those involved in teacher education in ELT (English Language Teaching). It explores the way that language teachers can best be advised and supported in their teaching situations. Such advisory encounters happen in a wide variety of contexts and involve a wide variety of different advisors and teachers. In-service seminars, pre-service training programmes, and workplace appraisal meetings all contribute to providing advice and support for teachers. However, we believe that a very important element in all of these situations is the discussion of teaching which takes place between the advisor and the teacher, i.e. the provision of feedback. It is this aspect of providing advice which we examine here. Thus, the book looks at the way that advisors operate within the classical teaching practice cycle as defined by Turney *et al.* (1982). They divide supervision into 3 stages: the Pre-observation Conference, the Lesson and the Debriefing:

PRE-OBSERVATION CONFERENCE —————▶ LESSON —————▶ DEBRIEFING

It is specifically the support and advice given to teachers and trainees within this cycle which we shall be examining in this book.

The book explores this aspect of teacher education in two ways. Part 1 provides a discussion of the processes of giving advice and Part 2 provides a series of activities and tasks which allow the reader to reflect upon the processes described in Part 1.

Who is the book for?

The book is designed for those who are involved in advising teachers in the widest sense of the term. The provision of effective feedback is an important part of the job of:

- college teaching practice supervisors and school-based mentors working with teachers at pre-service level
- tutors involved in observing teachers as part of INSET (in-service training) programmes
- inspectors in state education systems who are involved in both assessing the teacher and helping that teacher to develop

- Directors of Studies, headteachers and other promoted teachers conducting teacher appraisal or providing induction programmes for new teachers
- teachers working together collaboratively and acting as ‘critical friends’ to one another, either as part of informal teacher development programmes or more structured action research projects

All the above personnel will be involved in providing advice and giving feedback of one type or another – on a lesson, a lesson plan, or some other aspect of teaching and learning. We believe that this feedback is centrally important to the way that teachers learn and develop. It is the purpose of this book to provide an opportunity for all of those involved in providing feedback to reflect on the methods which can be used to maximise the effectiveness of this learning encounter.

The philosophy of the book

The model of the teacher

We believe that a fully professional teacher is one who is able to reflect critically on their own practice. Although the model of the teacher as the Reflective Practitioner (Schön 1983, 1987, Wallace 1991 and Chapter 2) is an expression of an ideal which often fails to be realised in the hectic day-to-day business of the real classroom, it is a central tenet of this book that effective teachers should be prepared to question and evaluate their teaching seriously with a view to understanding the processes of teaching and learning and in developing their own professional conduct. This means that teachers should be more than programmed automata delivering pre-selected material; they should be actively engaged in critically examining what they do in classrooms. Thus, the ultimate aim of providing advice is to produce a teacher or trainee capable of such independence of thought and action.

Counselling theories

Much of what has been written about helping others to develop in ELT education has its roots in theories of counselling. The models of counselling we use assume that the most effective development and change spring from within the individual themselves. Effective advice has to be ‘owned’ by the teacher and not merely imposed from the outside. Although this does not preclude prescriptive advice in certain circumstances, the model of counselling which is assumed is ‘client-centred’ in the sense that the ultimate goal is to encourage the teacher to explore personal experience and to arrive at personally-derived plans for action.

The model of learning

The approach to learning which underlies the tasks in the book is one of experiential enquiry, of working from data outwards towards abstract concepts. Thus, the tasks provided in Part 2 are designed to provide the ‘raw experience’ which will allow the reader to reflect on their own preferences and feelings about the procedures involved. From this reflection, it is believed that new ways of viewing the process will emerge, which can then be compared with the explanations and discussion provided in Part 1 of the book.

The humanist ‘paradigm’

There is a clear relationship between the views of counselling, teaching and learning expressed above. Each rests on the importance of the individual as the main actor in the process. This is not surprising. Ideas within different areas of activity such as education, training and psychology interact with each other and this interaction produces an amplifying effect. The net result of such interactions is the production of an interlocking system of thought: a general ‘paradigm’, which apparently offers a total view of the world and within which most thinkers and practitioners of a period work. The relationship between the Experiential Learning movement in learning theories, the Reflective Practitioner concept in education and the client-centred or humanistic approach in counselling represents just such an interlocking paradigm.

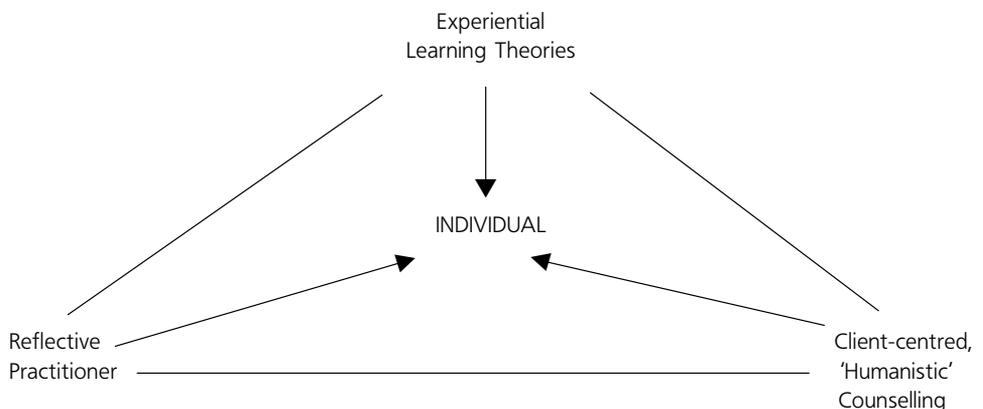


Figure 1 The Humanist paradigm

The role of discussion

Many of the ideas which underpin this book derive from this interlocking paradigm, but the aim of the book is not to ‘teach’ humanism or to ‘train’ client-centred counsellors. We believe in the power of group discussion in constructing knowledge and in reaching new understanding. We believe, following Vygotsky (Vygotsky 1978 and Chapter 3), that new understanding

and knowledge is not solely an individual entity, but is a social entity, created through discussion. It is hoped that through doing the tasks in groups and discussing these tasks, users of this book will not only fully internalise and understand the ideas behind the theories, but will also go beyond them to create their own understanding and interpretation of these ideas.

From the explanations offered in Part 1 of the book, readers will be aware of the paradigm but need not feel constrained to remain within it or accept all that it postulates. For example, it is realised that the ideas involved in the 'humanist' approach are very sensitive culturally, and that not all advisors, teachers and trainees will necessarily share the same philosophical point of view. The ideas put forward in the book are therefore provided as frameworks for discussion both on a cultural and a personal level and are not intended as panaceas for action or ready-made solutions for all situations.

How to use the book

Organisation

This book is divided into two parts. Part 1 discusses general issues concerning learning to teach, teaching practice supervision, giving advice and feedback. The discussion is based on research in the area as well as the authors' experiences of working with mentors and supervisors in a number of countries.

This section of the book begins and ends with an examination of the context within which advisors work. Chapter 1 looks at the different contexts within which advice is given – the institutional framework – and the final chapter looks at the wider cultural framework within which advisors work. Chapters 2 and 3 examine the 'cognitive aspects' of learning about teaching – looking at what learning theories can teach us about the development of professional practice. The book then goes on to discuss in depth the 'psychodynamic aspects' of providing advice, by examining the way that feedback is delivered through the perspective offered by different theories of counselling.

In Part 2, a series of tasks are included which aim to raise awareness of the key issues identified in Part 1. We have used these tasks with different groups in training and development sessions throughout the world, in order to raise awareness amongst teachers and trainers of the issues involved in learning about teaching and in reflecting on the way that feedback can be provided to teachers.

Each chapter in the first section is followed by

- a summary which reviews key features
- a list of tasks in Part 2 which can be used to explore and reflect on the issues raised in the chapter
- advice for further reading

Contents of Part 1

Chapter 1 provides a discussion of the contexts in which advisors work. Different training situations (e.g. pre-service teaching practice or in-service advisory support) will have important effects on the way advice and support are given. Within these different contexts, the chapter looks at the critical issue of teacher assessment vs teacher support and development.

Chapter 2 then examines the nature of teaching and the way that the skill of teaching might best be learnt. From the focus on the ‘context’ and the advisor’s role provided in Chapter 1, this discussion focuses on the subject itself (i.e. what is to be learnt) and the role of the teacher/trainee. This chapter involves the discussion of

- how skills are acquired
- the differing needs of teachers at different stages of development
- the Reflective Practitioner model of the teacher

Each of these will have a major impact on the way that the advisory process is carried out.

Chapter 3 then focuses on the structure of the teaching practice/advisory cycle and the way that the cycle can be used to enhance teacher learning. In particular, the chapter looks at the advisory cycle through the framework provided by two powerful models of learning:

- Kolb’s Experiential Learning cycle
- Vygotsky’s interactive model of learning

Chapters 1 to 3 locate advising within institutional, pedagogic and theoretical frameworks. Chapters 4 to 9 provide an overview of different counselling approaches as they relate to advising in ELT. This book proceeds from the belief that it is important for advisors and trainers to reflect upon the methods they use in giving advice and feedback to teachers. In order to do so they need a ‘vocabulary’ with which to describe what happens in feedback sessions. The vocabulary of interpersonal interactions can be provided from within theories of counselling. In Chapters 4 and 5, three different backgrounds to the advisory cycle are introduced. Chapter 4 begins by looking at different styles of supervision which have been used in ELT education and then, in this chapter and Chapter 5, two influential contributors to counselling practice are discussed with a view to providing a framework to reflect on the professional practice of giving feedback. These are:

1. Egan’s Three-Stage Model of helping, which is used to examine the overall shape of the advisory encounter.
2. Heron’s Six Category Intervention Analysis, which is used as a vehicle for investigating the detailed way in which advisors talk to teachers in the feedback session.

Using these models as a framework, the following four chapters consider the interpersonal skills involved in providing feedback. Chapters 6 and 7 explore the emotional aspects, with Chapter 6 examining the generic skills of creating

an appropriate climate for helping and Chapter 7 examining the way that emotional aspects can be dealt with in a feedback session. Chapters 8 and 9 then go on to look at the specific moves that advisors can make, first of all to lead and direct teachers and then to facilitate teacher/trainees in arriving at independent reflection on their teaching.

Finally, the book examines a series of different factors which affect the way that feedback is provided. The way of delivering, and the interpretation of, different interpersonal messages are highly sensitive to a number of factors, of which culture is one. However, there are also linguistic and personality factors which play an important part in the choice of feedback and the particular style of advice. This final chapter in Part 1 explores the relationship between these factors and offers a model for an explanation of the way that they operate in an advisory situation.

Throughout Part 1 there are references to Tasks from Part 2 which are intended to illustrate and provide a platform for discussion of the issues raised within each chapter.

Contents of Part 2: the tasks

The tasks are designed to provide opportunities to examine the advisory process and increase the reader's repertoire of advice-giving skills. This is done through reflection on personal experience, through group discussion and through the analysis of data, including transcripts of advice-giving encounters. The tasks are designed to allow the reader to consider their own experience of issues involved in feedback, to provide opportunities for groups of teachers/advisors to try out giving advice in different situations and – through discussion with colleagues – to pinpoint central issues which are important. Through this process readers are led to develop their own perspective on these issues and to develop their own repertoire of advice-giving skills. Each activity includes

- the task itself with photocopiable pages for use in group situations
- trainer notes with a suggested procedure for managing the task
- a commentary on the activity giving an indication of possible outcomes
- references to Part 1 of the book, detailing where the key issues to which it relates are discussed

The tasks are organised in sections which roughly follow the order of material in Part 1, but there are many instances where the implications of the role play or discussion will be dealt with in a number of different chapters in Part 1.

The role of the commentaries on the tasks

Commentaries on outcomes are provided after each activity. These are provided as a guide for the trainer using the book with groups to illustrate the central themes which could come out of the activity, but they are not provided as

‘solutions’ or ‘model answers’. It is intended that the users of the tasks will devise their own solutions to the problems set, and will compare these solutions with the discussion of issues provided in Part 1 of the book. Thus, each task has a cross-reference to the sections of Part 1 which discuss issues which may arise from the task.

Ways of using the tasks

The tasks have been designed primarily to be used in groups to generate discussion and debate. However, it is also possible for an individual reader to complete tasks and keep a record of their reactions and thoughts, then compare these reactions either with colleagues or with the explanations and models provided in Part 1. Alternatively the reader might like to further examine an issue raised in Part 1 by looking at the relevant task(s) in Part 2.

Language note

Finally, a note on the terminology. Although the process of advice is relevant to both serving teachers and pre-service trainees, the term ‘teacher’ has been used throughout to signify the recipient of advice, rather than the term ‘teacher/trainee’, or ‘client’ which is generally used in counselling. We have also employed the device of using ‘they’ as the generic singular as is used in sociology rather than the somewhat clumsy ‘s/he’. Within Part 2 of the book, we refer to those carrying out the tasks as participants, although as previously noted these tasks can be completed by individuals.